

# A Child of Books: Enriching the craft of writing and creativity

Karen Yager

## The Research

- Frawley, 2014: “The breadth and depth of ideas in students’ writing...[are] dependent on the reading students do.”
- Walsh (2010): Literacy has been shown to be founded in social practices. Peer editing, collaboration, consultation and evaluation are essential for good writing.
- Westwell (2009) & Black (2014): Creativity flourishes when connected to what is already known, clear goals are evident and skills are explicitly taught.

## Mastery

- Deliberate, sustained practice is the most effective path to mastery.
- It is a process of targeted work performed by a student in order to master an area of subject knowledge, a methodology or a skill.
- Chunking and building the field of writing
- Build in time during the school day for regular deliberate practice sessions.
- Learning from the masters
- Multiple drafts
- Oracy
- Students as expert markers: self and peer critiquing
- *Feed-forward*

## Rich texts to stimulate and inspire writing

If our students are to be inspired to write effectively they need to experience a plethora of quality texts that feature evocative settings, authentic characters, different approaches to form and structure, rich use of language and meaningful ideas. This must start in the junior years. We need to remember to encourage our students to delight in the aesthetic use of language.

The poets teach our students about fusing the language into compact and powerful texts that appeal to the senses, embrace lexical density and use form and structure to convey ideas that resonate. The playwrights demonstrate how to play with dialogue to reach and audience and our authors teach the art of characterisation. Photographers and painters provide fertile images that can trigger memories and stimulate ideas. The director teaches students to use verbal cinema to capture the intricate details, provide the back story and a mise-en-scene for a character and experiment with form, structure and points of view. The orator reminds students about the power of words, and the musician allows our imagination to soar.

Immerse students in a plethora of extracts from texts that use language, form and structure skilfully. You can access a range of texts and resources at the following websites:

## Rich texts

- Poem Hunter: <http://www.poemhunter.com/> - thousands of quality poems from all periods.
- Australian Films: <http://aso.gov.au/education/> - Clips from Australian films, documentaries and advertisements, and teaching resources.
- Poetry Library: <http://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poets-name> - Australian poetry library.
- Poetry in Translation: <http://poetryintranslation.com/> - Poetry from countries across the world.
- Asiacha: <http://www.asiancha.com/> - Asian poetry, short stories, creative non-fiction and essays.
- Poetry Kanto: <http://poetrykanto.com/> - A range of Japanese poetry.
- Muse India: <http://www.museindia.com/regular.asp?id=40> - A range of Indian poetry.
- Inanimate Alice: <http://www.inanimatealice.com/> - tells the story of Alice, a young girl growing up in the first half of the 21st century in China and Russia, and her imaginary digital friend, Brad. Fabulous inspiration for a multimedia narrative. Students could download or create postcards and use each slide in Power Point to write about their adventure.
- Magic Keys: <http://www.magickeys.com/books/>: A plethora of multimedia stories for all ages.
- The Shed: <http://www.literacyshed.com/the-other-cultures-shed.html> - brilliant site with a rich range of film clips, images and ideas to inspire writing for students of all ages.
- National Geographic: [http://travel.nationalgeographic.com.au/travel/your-faces-of-the-world-photos/#/mursi-man-ethiopia\\_39901\\_600x450.jpg](http://travel.nationalgeographic.com.au/travel/your-faces-of-the-world-photos/#/mursi-man-ethiopia_39901_600x450.jpg) - a range of fascinating images of people from the net:
- Tropfest film clips: *Be My Brother* - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8d-7IFN4DKA>, *The Unspoken* - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttA2Nk-bFog>, and *Lullaby* - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAIvJ\\_hsW4I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAIvJ_hsW4I)
- Award winning GGI animations: Such as *Home Sweet Home* - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKRZn0uS6eA>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmgQh2o9K-4> - *Worlds Apart*
- Backhand Stories: <http://www.backhandstories.com/non-fiction/> - a range of short stories, creative non-fiction and essays.
- Newspapers: <http://www.newspapers.com/> - 1200 newspapers from across America 1700-200s.
- Free audio recordings: <http://www.openculture.com/freeaudiobooks>
- Songs to inspire writing: <http://tylerlehmann.wordpress.com/2013/01/16/the-writers-playlist-15-songs-to-inspire-better-creative-writing/>
- *The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus* - Jen Bryant (3-6)
- *The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend* - Dan Santat (K-3)
- *El Deafo* - Cece Bell (4-6)
- *Rain Reign* - Ann M Martin (5-6)
- *Light Horse Boy* - Dianne Wolfer (5-6)

- *That Jack Boy* – Janeen Brian (5-6)

## Reading like a writer

When we teach our students to read from the perspective of a writer, they focus less on *what* the writer is trying to say and more on *how* the writer is saying it. Specifically, they look at the techniques the writer is using to get their message across and how those techniques affect them as they experience the text.

- Being critically and aesthetically aware of the construction of a text:
  - Structure and form
  - Voice
  - Rhythm, sound and impact of the language and syntax
  - Imagery
  - Conventions
  - Characterisation
- Each week collect an amazing sentence, extract, line from a text
- Find or create an image that reflects the quote
- Compose own short piece of writing that mirrors the style of the original writer
- OR designate a section of the classroom to be “*A Child of Books*” space and share the selections.

## Words

- Make them aware of every word: its sound, connotations and meaning.
- They can say so much with one simple word – polysemy!
- The verbs are the muscles of writing!
- **Primary students:**

Oliver Jeffers:

- *A Child of Books*
- *Once Upon an Alphabet*
- *The Heart and the Bottle*
- *The Way Back Home*

*The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus* – Jen Bryant (3-6)

*The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend* – Dan Santat (K-3)

*El Deafo* - Cece Bell (4-6)

*Rain Reign* – Ann M Martin (5-6)

*Light Horse Boy* - Dianne Wolfer (5-6)

*That Jack Boy* – Janeen Brian (5-6)

*Soon* - Morris Gleitzman

- **Secondary students:**

*Brown Girl Dreaming* – Jacqueline Woodson

Tim Winton – any books for extracts

*Let the Great World Spin* and *Transatlantic*– Colum McCann

*All the Light We Cannot See* and *Shell Collector* – Anthony Doerr

Gail Jones – any books for extracts

Charles Dickens – any books for extracts

*Suri's Wall* - Lucy Estela & Matt Ottley

*Teacup* - Rebecca Young & Matt Ottley

*Requiem for a Beast* - Matt Ottley

*Tree: A little story about big things* - Matt Ottley & Danny Parker

## Setting

- Imaginative responses can be enriched and deepened when they begin with setting.
- Zoom into the setting and focus on the details.
- Synaesthesia: colour, sound, smell...
- Imagery:
  - Visceral imagery: Appeals to the sense of sight.
  - Olfactory imagery: Appeals to sense of smell.
  - Gustatory imagery: Appeals to sense of taste.
  - Auditory imagery: Appeals to sense of sound.
  - Or the students could combine them and create synaesthesia!
- Pathetic fallacy

### Strategies for setting

- Sensory trail
- Trailers and film clips
- Photographs
- Google Earth
- National Geographic
- The neighbourhood
- Favourite room at home – the bedroom from teddy's perspective
- 'Out of Eden Walk' - <http://nationalgeographic.org/projects/out-of-eden-walk/>

## Characterisation

- Sometimes our most effective writing is based on our lives and our experiences. Think about the people they have met or the self and create one or more characters.
- Complexity
- Perspectives and values
- Back story: Capturing a character's past in a few words
- How they move and act in the setting
- Semiotics
- Dialogue and voice
- Relationships
- Actions and consequences

## Extracts as models

- **Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*: (Scrooge)** *"Oh! but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster."*

- **Rowlings' *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*:** (Headless Nick) *"He wore a dashing, plumed hat on his long curly hair, and a tunic with a ruff, which concealed the fact that his neck was almost completely severed. He was pale as smoke, and Harry could see right through him to the dark sky and torrential rain outside."*

## Writing everyday through vignettes

**Concept:** Place

### Minutiae

We need to remind our students to open their eyes and see the potential in what is around them.

- Take the students outside for a walk through the playground.
- Ask them to find an object that they are drawn to, such as a weed struggling to grow in the crack of a pavement, a piece of paper playing in the wind gusts, an ant valiantly navigating the treacherous expanse of the playground, or the bees gathering nectar from a flower...
- Make them aware of the sensory details: sounds, smells, sights and how they feel.
- They have three minutes to observe the object and then two minutes to record a list of adjectives, verbs and phrases to describe the object and its setting.
- They have five minutes to compose one or two paragraphs that describe the object. When the time is up they find a critical friend and share their writing.
- Refine the writing:
- Extracts from texts that use evocative descriptions of place or an object; in particular, auditory and visceral imagery
- Critique the writing
- Focus on two aspects, such as the auditory imagery: consonants, vowels and the use of onomatopoeia
- Reimagine and refine own writing
- Pebble writing: Provide each child with a small rock and they have to write a haiku or short description on the rock that is then placed in the classroom or in a "garden of stories".

### Through the lens of a camera

By seeing the world through the lens of a camera students learn how to be more effective writers – verbal cinema.

- The students take a walk through their neighbourhood with a parent and take 20 photographs that will allow people too 'see' the place.
- They could create a detailed map of the area to accompany the images and writing.
- They add a description to each photograph and create instagrams or a Pecha Kucha (20 images X 20 seconds – the images advance automatically)
- <http://www.pechakucha.org/>
- Participate in the Harvard "Out of Eden Walk"

## Master Chef Challenge

Place students in a small team or on their own and give them a box with the following ingredients. They have 30 minutes to create a masterpiece.

- 50-words only
- Ban the letter 'e'
- Specific ingredients in the secret box. E.g.
  - A shell
  - Two words: "memories" and "hidden"
  - A flower
  - A line or poetry – *'To see a world in a grain of sand...'*

## Concept: Place

Research a place like a writer. The students have to try to paint the setting in just 200 words using sensuous imagery, place names and figurative and sound devices:

- Moscow in the winter
- London near the London Bridge and the Tower of London during spring
- Old Delhi during the summer
- Amsterdam in the winter
- Hong Kong during an afternoon shower
- Abu Dhabi by night

## Found poems

Students can learn to write like a master by finding the best lines to create an "original" found poem.

- Show the students images or film clips of a place, such as Sydney Harbour. You could even use Google Earth!
- The students brainstorm adjectives to describe what they see.
- The students Google the place and find poetry, prose and non-fiction texts that could be linked.
- They have 20 minutes in teams of two or three to steal the best lines to create an original poem about this place.

## Preposition poem

Poets often begin lines with a preposition to so that the reader is immersed in the place and time of a poem. They provide direction and invite the reader to see through the persona's eyes and move with them through a poem. Share with students "The Pine-trees in the Courtyard" by Li Po

- Provide a list of common prepositions
- Students to rewrite their 50 word story or first sensory piece
- Move to describing other experiences in different places, such as:
  - Riding a wave on a surf-board
  - Walking through a bush trail
  - Walking through a busy shopping centre during lunchtime

- Looking at rock pools beside the ocean

aboard	about	above	among
against	according to	across	after
as	as to	along	alongside
amid	around	before	behind
below	beneath	beside	between
beyond	but	by	despite
down	during	except	for
from	inside	instead	in
into	like	near	next
of	off	on	onto
outside	out	over	past
since	than	through	throughout
to	toward	under	underneath
unlike	until	up	upon
with	within	without	within

## Through my Window

When students look out of the windows of their homes they see a unique world. They might see an old oak tree and a garden filled with colourful flowers or a city street with cars rushing by and tall buildings casting long shadows. What they see is influenced by their perceptions of self, others and the world.

They are to compose at home a description of what they see in their room and then out of their window. They then peer critique the description the next day and start to eliminate words and create a free verse poem.

Revisit lessons on imagery and poetic devices. They can then place the poem in a 3D frame that features a talisman and special object on the windowsill.

- "I looked through my Window" (Poetry)- Michela Morgan
- *Window or Home in the Sky* - Jeannie Baker
- *My Girragundji* - Meme McDonald and Boori Monty Pryor
- *My Place* - Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins

## Concept: Perspectives

### Dialogue

- During the first week of studying a text, the students take one of the character's dialogue and in groups of three take on the challenge of making it more descriptive and engaging. The class vote for the most effective rewrite.
- In the second week, the same trio introduce a new character to the text in a chosen scene.

### Through my Eyes

- Select an animal or bird at Taronga Zoo
- Describe what they see
- Back at school further research on the animal or bird
- Read *The One and Only Ivan* – **Katherine Applegate**  
*My life is flashing lights and pointing fingers and uninvited visitors. Inches away, humans flatten their little hands against the wall of glass that separates us. The glass says you are this and we are that and that is how it will always be. Humans leave their fingerprints behind, sticky with candy, slick with sweat. Each night a weary man comes to wipe them away. Sometimes I press my nose against the glass. My noseprint, like your fingerprint, is the first and last and only one. The man wipes the glass and then I am gone.*
- Create a vignette of what they see and how they feel
- Some animals live privately, unwatched, but that is not my life.

### Childhood Memories

- "When I was young I was invincible."
- The students have 20 minutes to construct a 250-300 word vignette.
- Then they work with a small group that critiques each other's work for the remainder of the lesson suggesting how the sentence structures could be improved.



### Palindrome

Palindrome: Reads the same backwards as forward. Forces students to focus on the meaning and placement of every word.

- *Lost Generation* – John Reed: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42E2fAWM6rA>

### Concept: Genre

- Minecraft – build a sustainable colony
- Journal articles written by a team of three (one each)

- NASA haikus competition: <http://swampland.time.com/2013/08/09/nasa-is-sending-these-poems-to-mars/>
- Jeffrey Bennett: *Max Goes to Mars* (Read by NASA astronauts in space) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9uBATiAEsbc>
- Tracey.K.Smith: *Life on Mars* –anthology of poetry (stage 3)
- *Worlds Apart* – animation - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O\\_R2wdWeF6Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_R2wdWeF6Q)
- Oliver Jeffers: *The Way Back Home* - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9uBATiAEsbc>

**Concept:** Appropriation

### Ekaphrastic Poetry

Ekaphrastic poetry is inspired by a photograph, image or artwork. One of the most famous examples is John Keats' poem "Ode to a Grecian Urn". Using a stimulus such as a painting or a photograph provides students with the initial topic and ideas.

Ask them to complete the following exercises:

1. Select a painting that speaks to you.
2. Research the artist and the painting.
3. Describe what is happening. Focus on using striking verbs!
4. Describe how the people in the painting feel. Focus on developing evocative adjectives, emotive words, strong verbs and striking imagery.
5. Decide what has happened or will happen. Focus on positional prepositions.
6. Develop a key message or theme. Focus on emotive words.
7. Compose an original ekaphrastic poem!

